

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
EASTERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK

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JEFFREY L. EASON,

Plaintiff,

-against-

MEMORANDUM AND ORDER
18-CV-1559 (JS) (SIL)

JANET DOE 1, JANET DOE 2, JANE DOE
(Clarion Hotel), JOHN DOE 1, JOHN
DOE 2, JOHN DOE 3,

Defendants.

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APPEARANCES

For Plaintiff: Jeffrey L. Eason, pro se
164704
Suffolk County Correctional Facility
110 Center Drive
Riverhead, NY 11901

For Defendants: No appearances.

SEYBERT, District Judge:

On March 12, 2018, incarcerated pro se plaintiff Jeffrey L. Eason ("Plaintiff") filed a Complaint in this Court pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983 ("Section 1983") against six unidentified individuals, five of whom are alleged to be New York State Parole Officers ("NYS Parole Officers") and the other is alleged to be the "hotel desk manager, clerk, or owner" of the Clarion Hotel located in Ronkonkoma, New York ("Clarion defendant"). Upon review of the declaration in support of the application to proceed in forma pauperis, the Court finds that Plaintiff is qualified to commence this action without prepayment of the filing fee. See 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a)(1). Therefore, Plaintiff's request to proceed

in forma pauperis is GRANTED. However, for the reasons that follow, the Complaint is sua sponte DISMISSED pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2)(B)(ii)-(iii), 1915A(b).

BACKGROUND

Plaintiff's brief Complaint is submitted on the Court's Section 1983 complaint form and alleges, in its entirety:

On 12-12-17 at or between the hours of 10 am to 12 pm I was awoken with guns to my head and forcibly handcuffed by 5 N.Y.S. Parole Officers and detained. They were allowed to enter by the hotel staff of the Clarion Hotel looking for a parolee. The room was rented by me alone. Suffolk County police was also called to check for warrants and none was found and I was still unlawfully imprisoned.

(Compl. ¶ II.) As a result of the foregoing, Plaintiff claims he is unable to sleep and has anxiety, for which he seeks to recover a damages award in total sum of \$175,000. (Compl. ¶¶ II.A.-III.)

DISCUSSION

I. In Forma Pauperis Application

Upon review of Plaintiff's declaration in support of the application to proceed in forma pauperis, the Court finds that Plaintiff is qualified to commence this action without prepayment of the filing fees. See 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a)(1). Therefore, Plaintiff's request to proceed in forma pauperis is GRANTED.

II. Application of 28 U.S.C. § 1915

Section 1915 of Title 28 requires a district court to dismiss an in forma pauperis complaint if the action is frivolous

or malicious, fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted, or seeks monetary relief against a defendant who is immune from such relief. See 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2)(B)(i)-(iii), 1915A(b). The Court is required to dismiss the action as soon as it makes such a determination. See id. § 1915A(b).

Courts are obliged to construe the pleadings of a pro se plaintiff liberally. See Sealed Plaintiff v. Sealed Defendant, 537 F.3d 185, 191 (2d Cir. 2008); McEachin v. McGuinnis, 357 F.3d 197, 200 (2d Cir. 2004). However, a complaint must plead sufficient facts to "state a claim to relief that is plausible on its face." Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 570, 127 S. Ct. 1955, 1974, 167 L. Ed. 2d 929 (2007). "A claim has facial plausibility when the plaintiff pleads factual content that allows the court to draw the reasonable inference that the defendant is liable for the misconduct alleged." Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662, 678, 129 S. Ct. 1937, 1949, 173 L. Ed. 2d 868 (2009) (citation omitted). The plausibility standard requires "more than a sheer possibility that a defendant has acted unlawfully." Id. at 678; accord Wilson v. Merrill Lynch & Co., 671 F.3d 120, 128 (2d Cir. 2011). While "'detailed factual allegations'" are not required, "[a] pleading that offers 'labels and conclusions' or 'a formulaic recitation of the elements of a cause of action will not do.'" Iqbal, 556 U.S. at 678 (quoting Twombly, 550 U.S. at 555).

III. Immunity

Plaintiff names five unidentified individuals who are alleged to be parole officers employed by the New York State Division of Parole and seeks to recover a monetary award against the New York State Division of Parole. (Compl. ¶ III.) Because Plaintiff seeks to recover a monetary award against these Defendants in their official capacities, they are immune from suit under the Eleventh Amendment. Papasan v. Allain, 478 U.S. 265, 276, 106 S. Ct. 2932, 2939, 92 L. Ed. 2d 209 (1986); Pennhurst State Sch. & Hosp. v. Halderman, 465 U.S. 89, 98-100, 104 S. Ct. 900, 906-08, 79 L. Ed. 2d 67 (1984).

The Eleventh Amendment bars suits brought by a state's own citizens in federal court. Woods v. Rondout Valley Cent. Sch. Dist. Bd. of Educ., 466 F.3d 232, 236 (2d Cir. 2006) (citing Alden v. Maine, 527 U.S. 706, 712, 119 S. Ct. 2240, 2246, 144 L. Ed. 2d 636 (1999)). It is well-established that, as an agency or arm of the State of New York, the New York State Board of Parole, Division of Parole, is immune from suit under the Eleventh Amendment. See Kentucky v. Graham, 473 U.S. 159, 166, 105 S. Ct. 3099, 3105, 87 L. Ed. 2d 114 (1985); Stone v. N.Y. City Dept. of Homeless Servs., 159 F. App'x 324 (2d Cir. 2005) (affirming dismissal of Section 1983 claim against the New York State Division of Parole as barred by the Eleventh Amendment); Garcia v. Div. of Parole Exec. Dept., No. 09-CV-2045, 2009 WL 2392160, at *1 (E.D.N.Y. August 3, 2009) (state agencies such as the Division of Parole "are entitled to

assert the state's Eleventh Amendment immunity where, for practical purposes, the agency is the alter ego of the state and the state is the real party in interest.'") (quoting Santiago v. N.Y.S. Dep't of Corr. Serv., 945 F.2d 25, 28 n. 1 (2d Cir. 1991)). The Supreme Court instructs that the Eleventh Amendment gives a state government immunity from suit, not just from liability. Puerto Rico Aqueduct & Sewer Auth. v. Metcalf & Eddy, 506 U.S. 139, 144, 113 S. Ct. 684, 687, 121 L. Ed. 2d 605 (1993) (citation omitted).

Plaintiff's claims for damages against the state employees sued in their official capacities are barred by the Eleventh Amendment. Graham, 473 U.S. at 165-167, and n. 14, (suit for damages against state officer in official capacity is barred by the Eleventh Amendment); Darcy v. Lippman, 356 F. App'x 434, 436-37 (2d Cir. 2009) ("Eleventh Amendment likewise bars [plaintiff] from pursuing a claim for damages against the individual defendants in their official capacities."). As such, Plaintiff's claims against these Defendants sued in their official capacities are barred by the Eleventh Amendment to the Constitution, Idaho v. Coeur d'Alene Tribe of Idaho, 521 U.S. 261, 268, 117 S. Ct. 2028, 2033, 138 L. Ed. 2d 438 (1997), and are thus DISMISSED pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2)(B)(ii)-(iii),

1915A(b).¹

IV. Section 1983

Section provides that

[e]very person who, under color of any statute, ordinance, regulation, custom, or usage, of any State ... subjects, or causes to be subjected, any citizen of the United States ... to the deprivation of any rights, privileges, or immunities secured by the Constitution and laws, shall be liable to the party injured.

42 U.S.C. § 1983. To state a claim under Section 1983, a plaintiff must "allege that (1) the challenged conduct was attributable at least in part to a person acting under color of state law and (2) the conduct deprived the plaintiff of a right guaranteed under the Constitution of the United States." Rae v. Cty. of Suffolk, No. 07-CV-2138, 2010 WL 768720, at *4 (E.D.N.Y. Mar. 5, 2010) (quoting Snider v. Dylag, 188 F.3d 51, 53 (2d Cir. 1999)).

It is well-established that Section 1983 "constrains only state conduct, not the 'acts of private persons or entities.'" Hooda v. Brookhaven Nat'l Lab., 659 F. Supp. 2d 382, 393 (E.D.N.Y. 2009) (quoting Rendell-Baker v. Kohn, 457 U.S. 830, 837, 102 S. Ct. 2764, 2769, 73 L. Ed. 2d 418 (1982)). Accordingly, "a litigant

¹ The Court notes that the Plaintiff's Section 1983 claims against NYS Parole Officers in their official capacities must be dismissed for the additional reason that "[n]either a state nor one of its agencies nor an official of that agency sued in his or her official capacity is a 'person' under § 1983." Spencer v. Doe, 139 F.3d 107, 111 (2d Cir. 1998); see also Will v. Mich. Dep't of State Police, 491 U.S. 58, 71, 109 S. Ct. 2304, 2312, 105 L. Ed. 2d 45 (1989).

claiming that his constitutional rights have been violated must first establish that the challenged conduct constitutes state action.” Flagg v. Yonkers Sav. & Loan Ass’n, 396 F.3d 178, 186 (2d Cir. 2005) (internal quotation marks and citation omitted); Fabrikant v. French, 691 F.3d 193, 206 (2d Cir. 2012) (“A plaintiff pressing a claim of violation of his constitutional rights under Section 1983 is ... required to show state action.” (internal quotation marks and citation omitted)). Indeed, “the under-color-of-state-law element of § 1983 excludes from its reach merely private conduct, no matter how discriminatory or wrongful.” Am. Mfrs. Mut. Ins. Co. v. Sullivan, 526 U.S. 40, 50, 119 S. Ct. 977, 985, 143 L. Ed. 2d 130 (1999) (internal quotation marks and citation omitted).

Here, as is readily apparent, insofar as Plaintiff seeks to impose Section 1983 liability upon a purely private person--the Clarion defendant--such claim is implausible. Because Section 1983 liability does not extend to private actors², Plaintiff’s Section 1983 claim against the Clarion defendant is DISMISSED pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2)(B)(ii), 1915A(b).

² Although not alleged here, private actors may be considered to be acting under the color of state law for purposes of § 1983 if the private actor was “[a] willful participant in joint activity with the State or its agents” or “conspire[d] with a state actor to violate a plaintiff’s constitutional rights.” Ciambriello v. Cty. of Nassau, 292 F.3d 307, 323-24 (2d Cir. 2002) (quoting Adickes v. S.H. Kress & Co., 398 U.S. 144, 152, 90 S. Ct. 1598, 1606, 26 L. Ed. 2d 142 (1970)).

V. Leave to Amend

Given the Second Circuit's guidance that a pro se complaint should not be dismissed without leave to amend unless amendment would be futile, Cuoco v. Moritsugu, 222 F.3d 99, 112 (2d Cir.2000), the Court has carefully considered whether leave to amend is warranted here. Because the defects in Plaintiff's claims are substantive and would not be cured if afforded an opportunity to amend, leave to amend the Complaint is DENIED. However, Plaintiff may pursue any valid claims he may have against the Defendants in state court.

CONCLUSION

For the reasons set forth above, Plaintiff's application to proceed in forma pauperis is GRANTED, however the Complaint is sua sponte DISMISSED WITH PREJUDICE for failure to state a claim pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2)(B)(ii)-(iii), 1915A (b)(1).

The Court certifies pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a)(3) that any appeal from this Order would not be taken in good faith and therefore in forma pauperis status is DENIED for the purpose of any appeal. See Coppedge v. United States, 369 U.S. 438, 444-45, 82 S. Ct. 917, 8 L. Ed. 2d 21 (1962).

The Clerk of the Court is directed to mark this case
CLOSED and to mail a copy of this Order to the Plaintiff.

SO ORDERED.

/s/ JOANNA SEYBERT
JOANNA SEYBERT, U.S.D.J.

Dated: August 21, 2018
Central Islip, New York